

Ephesians 1:1-14

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"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." ~ Ephesians 1:1-14

What is our identity as Christians? Why is it important to understand who we are? This is the exact thing that Paul is addressing in the first 14 verses of Ephesians. He is addressing our identity in Christ and showing us the importance of remembering who we are as Christians. So, with that said, let's take a look at Ephesians 1:1-14.

Ephesians 1:1-2

In the first two verses of Ephesians, Paul is addressing the Christians in Ephesus. He calls them God's holy people or in the NASB, Saints and the faithful in Christ Jesus. Everything that we are going to discuss is for believers, those who have trusted in Christ, been saved and filled with His Holy Spirit. If you have never experienced a personal relationship with Jesus, then you're missing out. Be encouraged though. God deeply desires for you to know Him. Take the time to think about all that the bible says Christ did for you in these first 14 verses!

Ephesians 1:3

Now, this is the verse where I want to really settle into, because it's about our identity as Christians. The first and most important point that Paul makes is that identity begins and ends "In Christ." The words "in Christ" or a form of them are found 10 times in the first 14 verses. The first point that Paul is making is the foundation for all of our blessings. It's our identity. Our identity can only be fully realized if we are in Christ. As Christians, we are blessed only because we are In Christ! Without being in Christ, none of these blessings are available.

Here in Mazabuka, we have a cell group that meets twice a month. A few weeks ago, we studied the first chapter of Ephesians and one of the members of our group asked a question that evening that stuck with me and led me to teach on these verses. In Ephesians 1:3, it says we've been "Blessed with Every Spiritual blessing in Christ." She just asked the simple question, "What does that mean? What are those blessings?" And I would ask one additional question: Why is it important to know the many ways that we, as Christians, have been blessed by God in Christ? These are the questions that I believe God wants to answer in these first 14 verses.

Now, verses 4-14 is not an exhaustive list of our spiritual blessings, because there are many ways in which God has blessed us in Christ, but I believe a majority of the blessings that Paul is referring to in verse 3 can be summed up in these verses. So, let's find out what they are!

Spiritual Blessings (Eph 1:4 – 14):

1. Ephesians 1:4

God Chose us to be Holy and Blameless.

“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before him.”

We cannot avoid the wording in this verse. The Greek word used here for “Chose” means to select (choose) out of, a highly deliberate choice. Think about that. God specifically selected you out of the world. He chose you!

I think it makes some of us uncomfortable to think of the ramifications for words like chose & predestined because it means that we are not the ones in control. And it’s scary when we’re not in control isn’t it? But think about the security that exists when it is God who is in control. He is 100% trustworthy, he always follows through with what He starts, He does it all in perfect love and in unapproachable wisdom. As opposed to us. Man isn’t always trustworthy, we, a lot of times, don’t follow through with what we start and our wisdom and knowledge is limited. In addition to that, we don’t know how to Love sometimes.

What we do can be undone, but what God does cannot be undone. I believe Paul writes this way to show us a fundamental truth about our salvation: It comes about by nothing on our own part! It’s totally a work of God in Christ. It’s a foundation of faith that we can build upon and rest in. And I don’t believe that it’s a mistake that he mentions it first after telling us that God has blessed us with every Spiritual blessing in Christ. Our faith rests in God’s 100% unmerited grace. God chose us!

And why did He choose us? Human wisdom tells us that God would choose us because there is something good in us that He wants or needs. But Scripture doesn’t confirm that logic. In fact, it says quite the opposite. In Mark 10, Jesus says “Why do you call me good. “No one is good except God alone.” In Romans 5, Paul says “at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.” And in Romans 7, Paul says “Nothing good dwells in Him.” Before Christ, Christians had nothing to offer God. There was no good in them because our good is like filthy rags to God (Isaiah 64:6). For all have sinned and fallen short of God’s standard. God chose us because He alone is good. We love Him, because He first loved us. He chose us to make us holy and blameless in His sight through Christ! It doesn’t say that he chose us because we are holy and blameless in His sight. He chose us, who have nothing good to offer, that we might have everything good to offer through Him. His word says that in Christ, we are a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come. He chose us so that we would be a spectacle to the Nations of His all sufficient Grace and abounding Mercy.

2. **Ephesians 1:5-6** **He Adopted Us.**

“In Love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to himself, according to the kind intention of His will—to the praise of the glory of His grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”

As the father of an adopted child, this verse hits really close to home and because of our adoption of Thomas, I’m learning more and more about my adoption with God.

Now, what I’m about to share with you is a reflection more of my shortcomings and sin then it is of Thomas. Thomas is a wonderful little boy. Sure, he has his flaws, just like the rest of us, but he is such a blessing to our home and family. So, when I talk about issues that we have dealt with or are dealing with, it’s in no way to bring shame on our son. It’s simply to point out that adoption is not the fairy tale that some people think it is and that parents of adopted children have a lot of junk that comes to the surface as God sanctifies them through parenting an adopted child.

With Our Adoption, God becomes our Daddy

Over the past few years, I have asked Thomas what he remembers of his earthly father, but he doesn’t remember much. The one thing that I do sense about his relationship with his father from when he was a toddler was that it was one of much fear and little intimacy.

God’s word says in Romans: For you have not received a spirit of slavery again leading to fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba, Father!”

You see, the Jews usually always referred to God as Yahweh – a very high and respected name for God. Very rarely did they refer to him as Father. In fact, there are only 15 occurrences in the Old Testament where God is referred to as a Father and the context is Him being the Father of the Jewish nation, and never a personal father. To call him father at a personal level was considered blasphemy, because it was putting God on our level. So, they just didn’t do it.

Now, if you contrast that with the New Testament: The word Father appears 311 times in the New Testament. In fact, in just the gospels alone, Jesus refers to God as his Father 65 times. In addition to this, in Mark 14:36 Jesus uses the word “Abba” to describe His heavenly Father. *There is no evidence in pre-Christian Jewish literature that Jews ever addressed God this way, because abba was a term used when little children addressed their earthly fathers. It was a very intimate reference to God and one that Jesus intentionally used.* (BibleStudyTools.com) Then Jesus takes it a step farther and says in John 10:30 that “I and the Father are one.”

Jesus was trying to show us that a dynamic shift was taking place in our relationship with God. We don't have to be afraid anymore, because we are sons and daughters of the most high! We are children of a heavenly father who is faithful, who wants what is best for us, who loves us unconditionally. In other words, He's got our backs! If you are a Christian, you are a dearly loved child. You can engage the God of the Universe on a very personal level now and cry out to him, daddy! And guess what, he'll answer.

Our Adoption comes at a cost!

Another thing that I've learned about adoption is that it comes at a cost. I now understand more fully the high, high price that God paid for our adoption. When we brought Thomas into our family, it came at a price. I remember plenty of times, in our finite wisdom, asking what in the heck have we just done? We already had 4 children and a family that had learned to function together. Our natural born children didn't grow up having to fight for their existence because we were there to provide it for them. They've grown up being loved. So, they know how to love in return. But not so with Thomas. He comes from a broken home. His father was an alcoholic and used to abuse his mom. Thomas has told us stories about how his older brother many times tried to convince him to steal. His daily existence was in one of the poorest compounds in Lusaka, Zambia. At age 5, he ran away from home and was eventually placed in an orphanage where he lived with 40+ other children for 2 more years until we got him. Here's a boy that learned very early in life to fight for everything and trust and love no one. So, when we adopted him, it was like throwing a hand grenade into a crowded market. There was a lot of carnage! Over the past three + years, there have been times when both Kerri and I have looked at each other and said that we don't know if we would do it again knowing what we know now. It has at times been such a high cost to our family! But then we think about God and the high price he paid for our adoption. Here we were, with all kinds of behavioral issues. We had learned since birth, because of our sin, not to trust him. We didn't know how to love God, but He chose us anyway. And he knew before the adoption ever took place, the many times we would screw up after the fact. Whereas Kerri and I said our decision might have changed had we knew the cost, His decision didn't change. And the price He paid was much more than the few thousand dollars we spent to adopt Thomas. It was the shed blood of His one and only Son!

Isn't this a tremendous blessing? The God of the universe is my daddy! And He loves and values me even more than I value myself. So much that he paid the highest price for my adoption. Isn't that awesome? This is my identity in Christ!

3. Ephesians 1:7-8 **He Redeemed Us and Forgave Our Trespasses.**

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.”

We have to go all the way back to Genesis to fully understand the ramifications of this verse. God spent 6 days creating the heavens and the earth and everything in it. He created Adam and Eve, the first humans and he said that everything He created was good. And when God says good, he means perfect. He then places Adam and Eve in the garden and tells them to be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it.

In the garden, Adam and Eve were without sin and because of this were able to have complete and unadulterated fellowship with God. They could see him face to face. If they had questions, they could ask. They could listen to His counsel and wisdom. They were loved deeply by their creator and they could feel this love. Life was perfect. Their relationship with God was perfect. Their relationship with creation was perfect. Death did not exist. Fear did not exist. Disease did not exist. They were provided for. And they were continually connected to God in an intimate relationship.

Then came the fall. God desired for Adam and Eve to depend on Him for everything, but they were deceived by Satan and chose to depend on His creation for knowledge and wisdom instead of the Creator Himself. They deliberately disobeyed God and ate the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Immediately, life as they knew it was changed forever. It was changed for them and for every one of their descendants. They were cutoff from God and cast out of the garden. They died spiritually. And they weren't the only ones to experience death. So was the rest of God's creation. The first animal died shortly after their decision to disobey God when He killed it to provide clothing for Adam and Eve. The world, which was once a place without fear, was now a place full of fear. Man now had to be afraid because he didn't have the Creator watching out for him. That day had to be the saddest day in the history of mankind. Disease now entered the world. Natural disasters. Calamities. Greed, starvation, wars, strife. The world before the fall was now the complete opposite of what it was created to be. And man, who was created in God's image, was now marred in sin and completely unable to regain the relationship He once had with his loving Creator.

God hates sin. So, after the fall, Adam and Eve could not be in His presence ever again and neither could their descendants. This is what Christ came to redeem. Redeem means a release effected by a payment of ransom. God redeemed us through Christ. Sin had to be paid for for us to be able to approach God again. It would either be paid for by our own death or by the death of someone else. So, he put all of your sin and all of my sin on Christ and sacrificed Him on the cross.

The wall (our sin) that divided us from a relationship with God, was torn down by the sacrifice of His only son. And because of His sacrifice and our faith in Him, we can now have the same fellowship and intimate relationship with God that Adam and Eve once did in the Garden before the fall. He paid our debt!

In addition to this, he promises that at His second coming, he will redeem all of His creation. That it will no longer groan with the pains of sorrow and death. That we will have new bodies and a new heaven and new earth. God is all about reconciling the world and everything in it back to Himself, back to the time when it was perfect in the Garden.

4. Ephesians 1:9-10 **He Made Known to Us the Mystery of His Will.**

“In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.”

Shortly after the fall, God pronounces a judgment on Satan, Adam and Eve. It is here where we first hear about the promised deliverer. In verse 3:15 God says to Satan, “And I will put Enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise him on the heel. In the midst of God judging Adam and Eve, a time when He could have sent them straight to the fiery abyss, the lake of fire, he doesn’t. Instead, he promises a deliverer who will crush Satan and restore man back to a relationship with God. But during the Old Testament, when and where this deliverer would appear remained a mystery.

With Cain and Abel, you see the first sacrifice and offerings. Abel’s sacrifice is acceptable because it was the spilled blood of a live animal. God had directed man to sacrifice this way because he wanted them to be continually reminded that the penalty for sin was death, their death. But he also wanted them to do this in remembrance to his promise in Genesis 3, that a deliverer would come and restore everything, which was lost. We see this act of sacrifice present in the lives of every hero of faith in the Old Testament: in Noah, in Abraham, in Moses, in Samuel, in David, etc... Think about the thousands of years that passed from Genesis through the writing of the Old Testament. Everywhere you look you see the Jews sacrificing to Yahweh. They were remembering their sin and they were remembering that God would send a promised deliver.

We see the deliverer promised again in Genesis 12 where God tells Abraham that he will bless all of the Nations through Him. As we then begin to progress through the Old Testament, you watch as the mystery of God’s redemptive plan begins to unfold until you reach the prophets, specifically Isaiah and Daniel.

In Isaiah, about 700 years before Jesus’ birth, we read. “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.” Here, God begins to reveal additional information about the coming deliverer / messiah.

Then comes the end of the Old Testament and there was 400 years of silence from God. He stopped speaking and the Jews were just waiting for the promised deliverer. 300 years later, we God reveals a little more about the deliverer and tells us when He’s going to come. Specifically, 470 years before Jesus’ birth,

Daniel prophesied that in 470+ years the Messiah would come. So, near the time of Jesus' birth, the prophecy of Daniel, if correct, would mean that the Messiah was to be born soon. So, the Jews sat expectantly waiting for this deliverer.

All throughout the Old Testament, ever since the fall, God's mystery of redemption through a deliverer was gradually being unveiled. It wasn't fully known, but God did make parts of it known. And there were some misunderstandings along the way who the Jews thought the deliverer/messiah would be. The word Messiah means "Anointed One." In Old Testament times, most often "Anointed One" was used to refer to a king. So, the Jews thought primarily in terms of a king when thinking of the coming Messiah. They thought that the Messiah would come as a conquering king and establish a real governing kingdom here on earth. Their expectation about the Deliverer was not that He would be God in human form.

Now think back, through all of those years, all the way back to the time of Adam and Eve. God revealed part of His will, in that He would send a deliverer, a Messiah. He even told us things about him and when he would be born, but the fullness of His mysterious will wasn't revealed until the birth of Christ and really the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Christ. The Jews knew it in part, but their expectations were a little off because it was all still a mystery.

But now, in Christ, the mystery is fully revealed. We can now look back across history and understand how God was orchestrating everything to bring about his perfect will. And that instead of sending an earthly king, He was sending a Heavenly King, God in the flesh, to establish His Kingdom and reconcile man back to God.

So, why is all of this important? His word says that He uses the foolish to humble the wise. We, as Christians, know the mystery that has been hidden since ages past. God has given us this specific knowledge. He has literally entrusted it to us, the unwise. We're in the inner-circle of the knowledge of God while the rest of the world struggles to see what life is all about. It's a blessing because we can see how he trusts us with this knowledge and chooses us to make it known to the nations.

5. Ephesians 1:11-12

He Gave Us an Inheritance

“In him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.” NASB

Verse 11 states that we have obtained an inheritance. But then Verse 13 says that the Holy Spirit is a guarantee of our inheritance. So, which is it? Have we received the inheritance or not? I believe the answer is both. There is part of the inheritance that we received the day we trusted in Christ. The “Now.” Then there’s the inheritance that we will receive when we one day see Jesus face to face. The “Not Yet.” Both are guaranteed, just one has not been realized. Listen to the truths found in God’s word about our inheritance and think about how it equips us for the “Now”, but gives us hope for the “Not Yet.”

Now

- All things that pertain unto life and godliness – 2 Peter 1:3.
- Partakers of the divine nature of Christ – 2 Peter 1:4.
- Power and anointing in the Holy Spirit – Acts 1:8, 1 John 2:27.
- Forgiveness of sins and freedom from guilt – 1 John 1:9 & Romans 8:1.
- Divine health and healing – Matthew 8:17.
- Freedom from poverty – assurance that our needs will be met - Matthew 6:36
- The prosperity in all things including our soul – 3 John 1:2.
- Love, joy, peace and righteousness in the Holy Spirit – Romans 14:17.
- Victory and freedom from the bondage of sin – Romans 8:11.
- More than conquerors in all things – Romans 8:37.
- An abundance of grace for every good work – 2 Corinthians 9: 8.
- An understanding of the mystery of God's will – Ephesians 1:9.
- Divine guidance - Romans 8:14.
- Happiness – Matthew 5, Beatitudes.
- Security – Psalm 91.
- Co-laborers with God – 1 Corinthians 3:9.
- Seated in heavenly places with Christ – Ephesians 2:6.

Not Yet

- Eternal Life – Titus 3:7
- A Holy City, a New Jerusalem – Rev 21:2
- Co-laborers with God – 1 Corinthians 3:9.
- No more death, sorrow, crying, pain – Rev 21:4
- Things even beyond our expectations and imaginations – 1 Corinthians 2:9.

6. Ephesians 1:13-14

He Sealed His Work in Us with the Holy Spirit

“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

The ultimate blessing! God with us. As Christians, we are now temples of the Holy Spirit, the living God!

As if He hasn’t already done enough for us, He goes one step further. Are you facing one of life’s many trials? The Helper is right there with you. Are you grieving? The comforter is right there with you. Do you lack wisdom on something God would have you do? The All-Wise Spirit of the Creator God is right there with you. Are you so troubled in Spirit that you don’t know how to pray? Guess what? He will pray for you. Do you need clarity on what sin exists in your life? He will bring conviction. Want some direction in life? It is He who gives words of knowledge and prophecy and he’s right there inside you. Are you or a friend in need of healing? He’s the doctor. Need help overcoming sin? That’s His game too! Do you want to learn from God’s word? Yep, that’s him as well. Are you weary and in need of strength? Guess what? Holy Spirit. And do you truly want to know if you belong to God? It’s the Holy Spirit living inside you who testifies to that fact.

As we would say in the States, the Holy Spirit is the “icing on the cake.” He is the extravagance of God’s grace being lavished on broken sinners like you and me.

Summary

Do you now see the importance of understanding who we are in Christ! There are many verses in Scripture which talk about the trials that we will face in this life and how, as Christians, we are to persevere to the end. Understanding our identity in Christ will help us in this endeavor. We must continually remember who we are: That we are chosen and what God has done, cannot be undone. We are holy and blameless because of His work in us. That we are adopted, sons and daughters of the Most-High. That we can call on the creator of the universe at a very personal level. That we have been redeemed. Our debt has been fully paid. That He has made us a city on a hill to display the mystery of the gospel that has been hidden since ages past. That we’ve been given an inheritance, everything that is Jesus’ is ours. And that everything has been sealed with the Holy Spirit who has now taken residence in our hearts and is with us at all times everywhere!

So, “I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.”